

Insights into women and stroke risk

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(HealthDay)—You might be surprised to learn that stroke is the number three killer of women.

Women and men have many of the same [risk factors](#) for stroke, but some—like high [blood pressure](#), migraine with aura, diabetes and stress—tend to be stronger or more common in women.

Your risk is also influenced by hormones, reproductive health and other sex-related factors.

These recent stroke-prevention guidelines were developed just for women.

If you're considering going on the pill for [birth control](#), have your blood pressure checked first. The pill and high blood pressure are a dangerous mix.

If you have high blood pressure and become pregnant, talk to your doctor about [low-dose aspirin](#) and/or calcium supplement therapy to lower your preeclampsia risk. Preeclampsia is a dangerous condition that often starts with a spike in blood pressure and swelling, among other symptoms, and can go on to affect not only your internal organs but also your baby's development.

Preeclampsia also puts you at risk for stroke later in life, more so if you smoke, have high cholesterol and are obese. Note: You don't have to have pre-existing [high blood pressure](#) to develop preeclampsia. That's why having regular blood pressure checks during prenatal visits is key to identifying it as soon as possible.

Other stroke-prevention advice: If you get migraine headaches with aura, don't smoke. Take steps to quit if you do. Work with your doctor on safe and effective anti-smoking options, from nicotine replacement to other helpful therapies.

Other preventive steps are needed at other ages. For instance, using

[hormone replacement therapy](#), such as after menopause, raises stroke risk. So does the abnormal heartbeat called atrial fibrillation—women over age 75 should be screened for it.

Fifty thousand more U.S. women than men have a stroke every year, and more women than men die from it. The time to start taking prevention steps is now.

More information: The American Heart Association's Go Red for Women program has more on [stroke prevention steps](#) to take throughout your life.

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